



Kate Edmundson
Interim Executive Director

LOS ANGELES COUNTY COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

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DR. HARRIETTE F. WILLIAMS

APPROVED MINUTES

The General Meeting of the Commission for Children and Families was held on Monday, **October 2, 2006** in room 739 of the Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration, 500 West Temple Street, Los Angeles. **Please note that these minutes are intended as a summary and not as a verbatim transcription of events at this meeting.**

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT (Quorum Established)

Patricia Curry
Ann E. Franzen
Daisy Ma
Dr. La-Doris McClaney
Rev. Cecil L. Murray
Adelina Sorkin
Dr. Harriette F. Williams

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT (Excused/Unexcused)

Carol O. Biondi
Hon. Joyce Fahey
Susan F. Friedman
Helen A. Kleinberg
Wendy L. Ramallo
Sandra Rudnick

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

The agenda for the October 2, 2006 meeting was unanimously approved.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the September 18, 2006, general meeting were unanimously approved.

CHAIR'S REPORT

In the absence of Chair Kleinberg, Vice Chair Sorkin brought the meeting to order.

- The election of Commission officers will take place on October 16. Helen Kleinberg is nominated as chair, and Sandra Rudnick and Adelina Sorkin are nominated as vice chairs.
- The final draft of the Commission's annual report will be distributed to all Commissioners this week for comment.
- The New Beginnings conference will take place on October 5 at the Los Angeles Convention Center, and the Nexus conference is scheduled for the end of this month. Commissioners should have received information on both.
- An invitation to the Teague Foundation's Rising Star event, scheduled for the last Saturday in October, was included in Commissioner packets. Former Commissioner Janet Teague's foundation sponsors the event, whose proceeds go toward youth scholarships. Anyone interested in attending is encouraged to contact the Commission office or Vice Chair Sorkin.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

- Incoming Department of Children and Family Services director Trish Ploehn summarized her vision for the department as consistent with that set collaboratively under the leadership of former director David Sanders. Safety, reunification, and permanency continue to be priorities as the county and department move together from three years of planning to full implementation of various initiatives designed to achieve those outcomes.
- Susan Kerr, currently chief deputy of the Department of Mental Health, will serve as Ms. Ploehn's new chief deputy beginning October 16. Ms. Kerr comes with outstanding experience in finance and mental health, very helpful with regard to Title IV-E waiver planning and the Katie A. settlement.
- DCFS participates in a multidisciplinary team—with the departments of Mental Health, Health Services, and Public Social Services—that walks the streets of skid row assessing children and families. A process is also being developed in each regional office to designate social workers for homeless cases. Last week, the Board of Supervisors discussed skid row and the homeless project, and approved nine items to oversee contracts for those families who may not require child welfare services, but who have other needs. Ms. Ploehn will keep the Commission apprised.
- In the late 1990s, when the law regarding concurrent planning was enacted, much lip service was paid to the concept, but little was actually done. Over the past two years, DCFS has undergone an extensive planning process, beginning its implementation of concurrent planning in the Lakewood office and subsequently extending the structure to 9 of its 18 offices. Simply put, concurrent planning shifts the focus of services to the front end and moves planning for permanency to day one of the case. Adoption workers do permanency work in addition to adoptions, and case-carrying workers keep cases all the way through to either adoption or reunification. The streamlined

new process considerably reduces delays, and another 80 staff will be available on November 1 to continue the concurrent planning rollout to all regional offices.

PERSONNEL COMMITTEE REPORT

Kate Edmundson reported that the bulletin exam for the Commission's executive director position closed September 22. Of the 28 applications received, three were rejected, seven were incomplete (though outstanding information could still be sent), nine were accepted, and nine are pending review this Wednesday. All in all, at least 18 people may qualify to be interviewed. Commissioner Murray will serve on the interview panel, which will meet for several days toward the end of this month to produce a final list of candidates.

RETREAT COMMITTEE REPORT

The Commission retreat will be held on October 30 in the Sierra meeting room at The California Endowment facility near Union Station, beginning with breakfast at 8:30 and wrapping up around 3:00 p.m. Commissioner Ma outlined the confirmed agenda:

- A welcome by Chair Kleinberg
- A statement of the retreat's purpose by Commissioner Ma
- A perspective from a 'freshman' by Commissioner Franzen
- An talk on child safety and well-being by Vice Chair Sorkin
- The presentation of individual goals for the year by all Commissioners and youth representatives (five minutes each)

After lunch, Commissioner Ma hopes to involve Commissioners McClaney, Fahey, and Murray in speaking on other topics.

STATUS OF TITLE IV-E WAIVER

No word from the state on its funding cap has yet been received, though the governor has agreed that counties have 30 days from the receipt of that information to submit their waiver plans. The waiver's Federal funding cap is based on actual expenditures in fiscal years 2001–2002, 2002–2003, and 2003–2004, Claudine Crank explained, years when state funding was at a lower level than it is currently. The county is negotiating with the state to base administrative dollars on current allocations instead; because the waiver is meant to be cost-neutral, this is a point of discussion. Under the cap, savings exist to begin with, since foster-care caseloads have decreased since 2001–2004 and funding for out-of-home care would therefore be higher than needed. If the caseload trend continues, as is assumed, more dollars can be used flexibly, directed toward strategies that help achieve the department's desired outcomes. The Probation Department will also get part of the funding to serve its population.

The agreement with the Federal government requires waiver implementation no later than January 1, 2007, and unless the state can negotiate a postponement, the state's delay in announcing its funding cap could pose a problem. DCFS is trying to anticipate what would be needed, refining the 'crosswalk' document presented at the last Commission meeting to focus on six priority areas where, Jackie Acosta said, it can get the most 'bang for the buck':

- **Front-end assessments for substance abuse, domestic violence, and mental health needs** that are integrated with existing assessments (multidisciplinary assessment teams, regular mental health screenings, and screenings done at the medical hubs) as well as with Probation assessments, AB 129 efforts, the START redesign, and the court's new 241.1 protocol; contracting and procurement issues must be considered, as well as decisions about whether to phase in the assessments or implement them countywide right away
- **The expansion of family team decision-making**, which is having a major effect on positive outcomes
- **The expansion of family finding and engagement**, to replicate at the front end the positive achievements of the Permanency Partners Program (P3)
- **Community-based placements**, changing practices and recruitment so that children may be kept within their own communities
- **The expansion of family preservation services**
- **The enhancement of parent/child visitation**, including hiring new staff or contracting out for visitation support and oversight monitors, and making sure they are properly trained

Other areas being studied include:

- The prevention motion, which is moving forward
- Mentoring programs
- Service integration as a whole
- Ongoing strategies within faith-based communities

With the abundance of information yielded by the waiver process, the department will be well positioned to say where investments should be made once costs are available. It is committed to continuing the community planning aspects of the plan's development, and wants to maintain the dialogue with stakeholders and incorporate their feedback.

With regard to family finding and engagement, Commissioner Williams encouraged the development of a multi-tiered plan when children are placed with relatives (the department's biggest placement category) so that caregivers can be assured of support, and so that when an aging grandmother can no longer care for the children, for example, social workers needn't start from scratch in locating other relatives. Dr. Acosta agreed that a plan should be developed up front for placement options and a support system, with everyone involved already approved and background-checked.

In terms of phasing in an initiative rather than taking it countywide, Vice Chair Sorkin cited the example of wraparound services, which started in regions where providers were well established, leaving SPA 6—where the need is arguably greatest—for last.

Although the existence of providers is one factor in determining readiness, Dr. Acosta said that so-called 'pilot' projects are often more interested in proving the success of a given model than in serving areas of need. Especially with the waiver plan, DCFS is less invested in maximizing initial outcomes and more in seeing the long-range effects of the strategies it employs. Staff discussions center on the highest-need communities, recognizing the limitations they may have.

The department's history, Commissioner Williams said, is to develop pilot projects close to provider agencies having particular skills or capacities, something that has not necessarily served SPA 6 well. As the Commission's representative to First 5 LA, she is hearing that community-based agencies are being ignored in arenas such as community-based placement, rather than being strengthened and empowered to address those issues. Larger organizations may have the sophistication to respond to RFPs and solicit grants, while smaller agencies—which have the skills and know the community—may not have the wherewithal to orchestrate funding. The department struggles with eligibility requirements for community-based agencies, Dr. Acosta said, and the ongoing dialogue and engagement with providers inherent in the stakeholder process is revealing further options within the process as a whole. Commissioner Williams suggested setting up a conversation between DCFS and First 5 LA on empowering community-based agencies.

Commissioner Curry agreed in principle, but referred to her experience with the provider selection for wraparound; though community-based agencies were desired in each SPA, some had no experience in wraparound and scored low in the process. Are community-based agencies desirable if they cannot do as good a job as organizations located elsewhere? The balance between location and quality is tricky, and the family preservation program experiences the same challenges. Commissioner Williams concurred, yet still encouraged the empowerment and training of community-based agencies so that they can ramp up their involvement. In SPA 6, for example, S.H.I.E.L.D.S. for Families, the lead agency for First 5's Partnerships for Families initiative, is a good model for community-based agency cross-training with a major agency.

A number of challenges have arisen in the wraparound program, both with providers and in hiring internal staff, but close to 600 slots are now being utilized. Both Vice Chair Sorkin and Commissioner Curry questioned the capacity of the program, asking for an analysis of how many children are currently enrolled, how many others need these services, and what criteria for eligibility have been set. Dr. Acosta said that the program focuses on the highest-end individuals, and any expansion resulting from Title IV-E waiver dollars would have to determine whom it would serve most effectively. Commissioner Curry related conversations she heard during Mental Health Services Act planning meetings in which providers were bragging about receiving \$6,000 to \$7,000 for each wraparound case, when not nearly that amount of money was needed. Years ago, the program was designed to provide \$7,000 in services to each of the 300 highest-end children in the county, but Ms. Crank said that the latest contract, effective January 2006, structures payments differently. A flexible funding pool has been created, with each provider allowed only a capped number of dollars from that pool. Unused monies then go to a

countywide flexible pool to provide services and supports for very high-need individuals whom other providers may not have the funds to support. Children are eligible who are in RCL level 12 to 14 placements, or who are at risk of such placement; some children are being served who are not yet at that level, which is part of what needs tightening within the system.

Ms. Ploehn promised an accounting of all wraparound slots available, how many DCFS children are eligible for the program, and, if eligibility criteria were changed, how many children would be eligible and how many slots would be needed to serve them.

DCFS CRITICAL INCIDENT AND CHILD FATALITY SECTION

The section has been in existence since 2003, Cassandra Turner said, and was created at the request of the Board of Supervisors—as a result of an audit of the department—to maintain consistent data on critical incidents and child fatalities. Once section staff are notified of a child death by the child abuse hotline, they look at whether DCFS has a current or prior history with the case, when the department was involved, and the nature of the death (accidental, homicide, suicide, natural, or undetermined). Suicides are referred to the medical director's office for handling and tracking, and natural deaths go to the medical placement section.

Homicides indicative of abuse or neglect take precedence and immediately undergo an initial case review to determine the extent of DCFS involvement in the case, the family's history, and why the child was referred to the department. A child death review panel is set up that includes section staff and representatives from the medical director's office, plus a team from the appropriate regional office (regional administrator and assistant administrator, supervising social worker, children's social worker, and any outside support), the Department of Mental Health, County Counsel, and the Inter-Agency Council on Child Abuse and Neglect (ICAN). The social worker presents the case background, family history, and departmental actions, and the panel discusses what systems or operational issues may have impeded the social worker in doing his or her job, and what changes could be made that might prevent another such death. Following the review, an administrative debriefing is held to discuss any possible liability in terms of the services provided to the family, and to further review the casework. (Suicides, handled by the medical director's office, very rarely go through the administrative debriefing, though they can.) If necessary, the case is referred to the internal affairs section, which further reviews practice and procedural violations, and then to the performance management section for disciplinary action.

The death review report addressing systems and operational issues is distributed in-house by Ms. Turner's section, which also presents a 30-day report to the Board of Supervisors with a broader history of each case, its referral history, and the extent of DCFS involvement. A further 90-day report to the Board on homicides proposes practice improvements for the department. In addition, the section studies trends and informs the Board about the numbers of homicides and accidental deaths, their locations, and the case status within the department. Representatives from the section sit on ICAN's death review board each

month, and work closely with the Office of Independent Review (OIR), to which all child deaths are also referred, the OIR is developing protocols for interaction.

Recently, the number of gang-related drive-by shootings has jumped, as have unexplainable homicides. Although no two deaths are alike and determining causality is difficult, Ms. Turner believes that increased drug use and the age of parents are two factors that may be common to these increases.

Commissioner Ma asked about the Sheriff's Department's involvement in homicides—according to the e-mail reports Commissioners receive, when that department enters the picture, DCFS often closes the file. Ms. Turner said that if law enforcement's criminal investigation fails to uncover a suspect, police investigations are sometimes stymied; DCFS does not necessarily close its case, however, especially if other siblings are in the home. With gang-related shootings, however—most of which have no allegations of abuse or neglect—her section tracks the data but does not investigate, and will close those cases.

Vice Chair Sorkin recalled a case about five years ago involving a child—in child care Monday through Friday—killed by his grandmother's boyfriend, who watched him on the weekends while the grandmother worked. Does the department know who is caring for children when they are not in child care? Theoretically, Ms. Turner said, all adults providing care are supposed to be known and approved by the department, with the appropriate criminal background checks in place. (Her section's case review always checks the LiveScan/CLETS status of those involved, and whether they are part of the case plan developed by the family decision-making process.) In practice, however, sometimes no indication exists that a given individual would commit this kind of crime.

Commissioner Curry requested child death statistics going back as far as possible, and Ms. Turner promised to confer with Ms. Ploehn for permission to release them. She has data back to 2003, including how many deaths were gang-related, and will break the information out by victim's age (to determine if those involved in drive-by shootings are getting younger) and by type of placement (with relatives, foster parents, or elsewhere). In answer to Commissioner Ma's question regarding the department's reactions to trends in gang activity, Ms. Turner said she would find out what specialized programs are being developed, how case plans target children at risk for gang activity, and how children in gang-identified areas are treated differently.

Commissioner Williams asked about tracking the gang-related homicides of children who have moved from DCFS to probation camp, and been released to their families from there. At the time of their deaths, these children are no longer under DCFS supervision, and Ms. Turner does not track those cases. As DCFS moves into a closer relationship with Probation as a result of waiver funding, Commissioner Williams recommended looking at 'dual supervision' youth more carefully, and developing ways to work with them differently. They may be leaving camp and being released into a very dangerous situation. Ms. Turner agreed, saying that if children are removed from known gang families and return to that same environment, what's changed to make it better for them?

Gang activity within the camps is on the rise, as are 'initiations' both in and out of camp, which may account for the rise in gang-related shootings.

RUNAWAY TASK FORCE

Anita Shannon reviewed the recent history of the task force, which was reconvened by the Board of Supervisors in December 2005 and given several charges:

- To ensure that the numbers of youth absent from placement without leave are entered into the ARKS (Abducted and Runaway Kids) data system accurately and in a timely manner
- To reconvene with all appropriate stakeholders, including the Commission and Board deputies
- To more fully understand the runaway population

The task force has met since December and formed both law enforcement and youth concerns subcommittees, and created a training curriculum for entering data into the ARKS system. It is looking at three major subcategories within the runaway population:

- Youth with a high instance of substance abuse (broken out between those using marijuana/alcohol and those using far more risky methamphetamines)
- Youth with mental health interactions (from one therapy visit all the way up to hospitalization)
- Youth with multiple runs

The task force is recommending:

1. Appointing a runaway coordinator/manager to maintain an accounting of these youth, working with law enforcement and schools
2. Appointing one or two children's social workers as 'runaway champions' to informally specialize in those issues within each regional office
3. Placing all runaway cases within a centralized unit, using self-selected workers in each office to bring the numbers down; once the youth are found, their cases would return to the normal caseload and staff would be reabsorbed into the staff population
4. Refining the policy instructing staff to report runaways to their schools, where—if communication is kept open—youth are found more often than not
5. Further defining 'runaways' into subcategories:
 - Youth who are 'multiple runners'
 - Youth who nearly always return to the same place (can it be made an appropriate placement?)

- Youth living as couples (underage teens with men in their twenties, for instance, or young women with children who constantly return to their boyfriends)
6. Fully engaging the Bureau of Resources, especially with the possibilities inherent in waiver funding

The runaway population looks very different than it did 10 years ago, when staff worked primarily in the Hollywood area. Many more youth now have substance abuse issues, or are transgendered, and resources need to mirror those changes. Commissioner Curry commented on the youth she has seen emancipating out of care and immediately returning to the families they had been removed from; perhaps wraparound services could be offered to enable these youth to remain there to begin with. Ms. Shannon confirmed that the youth concerns subcommittee had discussed this topic, recommending that ways be found to place children with adults who are significant in their lives.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

MEETING ADJOURNED